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ABSTRACT

Based on the belief that teacher educators can no longer be satisfied to teach about whole language without teaching through whole language, this article presents five major premises of whole language and then describes several strategies by which this philosophy has been implemented in university classrooms. The premises are that learning happens best: (1) when it occurs in "wholes" rather than in disjointed, decontextualized parts; (2) when learners perceive and participate in authentic uses of what is being learned; (3) when the social nature of learning is valued and taken advantage of; (4) when learners have control over what, when, and how they learn; and (5) when learners have the opportunity to reflect on their learning. The article next describes five activities which stem from the premises just listed: (1) walking journals (written dialogues among a group of people); (2) literature circles and text sets (a group of people coming together to read and discuss a related set of books); (3) author's circles (small groups who give feedback on each other's writing); (4) expert projects (self-chosen student projects); and (5) community engagement (projects designed to help students use the community as a resource for creating knowledge and meaning). (SR)

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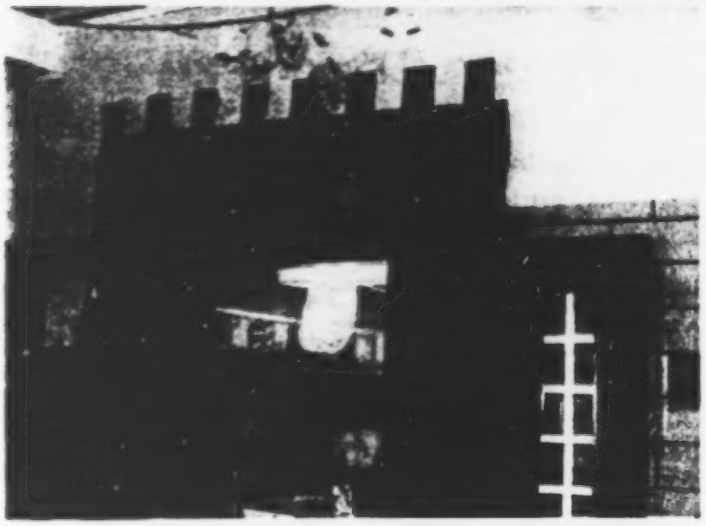

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by

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INSIGHTS into open education

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Whole Language Goes to College

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Over the past ten years whole language classrooms, and teachers interested in moving towards whole language, have become increasingly prevalent in schools. Both future teachers and practicing teachers are anxious to learn more about this philosophy, and turn to the colleges and universities for help. As teacher educators, we see the importance of preparing our students to work and grow in whole language classrooms. Like whole language teachers in elementary and secondary schools across the country, we, too, are trying to bring our university classroom practice more in line with our beliefs. If whole language is a unifying theory of language and learning for all learners irrespective of age, we cannot justify "delivering" content in college classrooms through lecture, assigned research papers, and examinations. We can no longer be satisfied to teach *about* whole language without teaching *through* whole language.

As teacher educators, we have been working to put whole language theory into practice in our classes. Our goal is to establish an environment where students and faculty can engage in, and reflect upon, authentic learning experiences. In this article we present five major premises of whole language philosophy and then describe several strategies by which we have implemented this philosophy in our university classrooms.

Premises of Whole Language

Whole language is based on a set of beliefs about language and learning. At the risk of oversimplifying a very complex field, we briefly describe these beliefs as follows:

1) **Learning happens best in "wholes" rather than in disjointed, decontextualized parts.** That is, we best learn real world skills associated with particular content contextually rather than separately from their real world uses.

2) **Learning happens best when learners perceive and participate in authentic uses of what is being learned.** For example, writing skills are learned best when students have genuine, personal reasons for writing, and real audiences for whom to write.

3) **Learning happens best when we value and take advantage of the social nature of learning.** The very fabric of experiencing and knowing is a social construction. It is through language that we enter into others' experiences, and extend our own understandings to those around us. As we think and act together, we create new knowledge and grow beyond our current thinking.

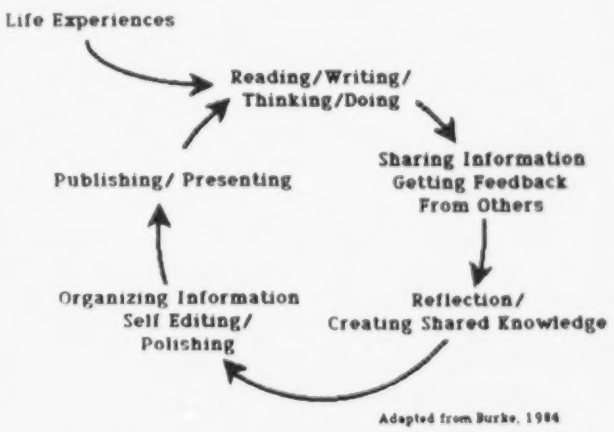
4) **Learning happens best when learners have control over what, when, and how they learn.** Although all learning is social in nature, in the final analysis meaning is personal to each learner. When educators recognize and value multiple perspectives of reality, they free their learners to explore their personal worlds by asking and answering their own questions.

5) **Learning happens best when learners have opportunity to reflect on their learning.** We come to know by direct experience, but we do not understand until we step away from that experience and view it as an object of study. When learners take a reflective stance they become architects of their own learning.

Learning Model

Our education classes are organized to encourage students to help one another, to collaborate on a variety of tasks, to stretch one another's thinking, and to allow students to choose tasks which are personally important and interesting. Embedded within each of the activities presented in this article are opportunities for students to draw from their life experiences; to work, write, read and think together; to bounce their ideas and thoughts off one another; to refine their thinking, writing, or work; and to share newly created knowledge with others. We teach this way not only because we wish to demonstrate these kinds of activities and this approach to education (which we do), but also because this reflects our current (and emerging) understandings about how we can best facilitate learning. As such we hope our students will understand and embrace these perspectives as well.

The following diagram conceptualizes how we can implement these premises in classrooms. This model guides our planning throughout our curriculum.



The Collaborative Learning Cycle

This article presents five activities which stem from the goals and the premises listed previously. These activities are: (1) **walking journals,** (2) **literature circles,** (3) **authors' circles,** (4) **expert projects,** and (5) **community engagements**.

We want to caution both our readers and our students at this point that simply because we have implemented these activities in our methods classes does not in itself mean that we are really "doing" whole language. Because whole language is a theoretical construct, it cannot be matched directly to activities. We must look for evidence within our practice of the underlying premises listed above to gain a sense of our success at implementing whole language.

Like all teachers, university faculty who work to change their curriculum to better reflect a whole language philosophy find that many of the structures within schools serve beliefs contrary to whole language. Grading, the partitioning of time and subjects, the use of space, and the traditionally defined roles of student and teacher are all inherited from a belief system that assumes that learning is the accumulation of facts that can be sequentially ordered, delivered, and measured. Merely adding the following activities to a traditional curriculum, without addressing the larger issue of the beliefs underlying whole language, does little to improve that curriculum. Like elementary teachers who teach children's literature in the same way they taught with the basal reader, the following activities might be implemented without an examination of the whole language philosophy. Whole language does not reside in the activity, but rather in the philosophy that guides the activity.

It is with these cautions in mind that we suggest the following activities as ways we have attempted to help education students experience and understand whole language.

Walking Journals

The following excerpt comes from a "Walking Journal," a written dialogue among a group of people (Heine, 1988).

Stanley, October 4, 1989

The issue I'm becoming aware of lately is the one concerning mainstreaming. I'm glad we received the assignment in this area because it made me do more research about it. I'm not

quite sure I agree with the arguments put up to defend these issues but it does offer a lot of food for thought. I do think it is good for some of these kids to enter our school systems. I do have some questions about maybe putting a deaf person in a classroom where a teacher has to spend a lot of time with that individual and lack of time with the other students. Believe it or not I've seen this case happen in a small school. This is a big thing and I'm not sure all the questions have been answered.

Anyone else have anything to add to this subject matter? I would be interested to hear more about it. I have a friend who had to pick up sign language to deal with this within her classroom. I hope this doesn't become a deterrent to learning for other students who need that extra time with the teacher.

Renae, October 5, 1989

I personally have little knowledge (or views) on mainstreaming. If I had any time I would definitely take one of the special education classes just to have some background. However, it doesn't look like I'll have time.

I can easily see myself spending so much time with that one student and leaving the others behind. Yet I think each student wants to be independent.

Sue, October 6, 1989

It is interesting that Stan brought up the topic of mainstreaming and integrating deaf children into a "hearing" classroom because the article I am reacting to this week attends to both of these issues. I have not read it thoroughly yet but the message I get is that both the hearing and deaf children can benefit from the integration, especially when the hearing children are guided in the understanding of the existence of the sub-culture of the deaf population. Thus, the experience is one of social studies experience! I should note that the photos in the magazine showed the deaf children wearing the "transistor radio" type thing that aids in their hearing. If any of you want to read the article let me know.

Ginny, October 9, 1989

I am aware of the mainstreaming issue. I enjoy children, especially the primary level, but I'm not sure if I can handle the special kids. I don't think I would have the patience and would give extra attention they need. This issue tests my ability to be a good teacher, but I don't know if I will pass the test. It will be my responsibility to work with some special kids this summer, so I can understand and relate to them. I am looking forward to this experience so I can find out for myself if I can teach them.

Chris, October 10, 1989

Mainstreaming is an important issue—one that you will face in the classroom. If you feel "lacking" in background on this topic, I'd suggest you do some reading this summer. One of the best situations I've seen in the schools is at Madison Elementary (in St. Cloud) where the classrooms have the district's hearing impaired. Some wear "amplifiers" and so does the teacher. Some have signers who accompany them to the classes. These students are very accepted by the others because of the way the situation is handled by the classroom teachers. Attitude is so important.

As can be seen from the excerpt, each group member has the opportunity to read other people's entries and to add his/her own entry each time the journal is passed to him/her. In our class, journals typically "walk" among four students and a faculty member. (In the journal cited the faculty person is our colleague, Chris Gordon.) We ask students to try to share important issues from the journals in class on a weekly basis.

To get the journals started, we simply explain what a walking journal is, pass out the notebooks, and ask students to sign up for a day of the week on which they can expect to receive the journal. We ask students to sign up in journals with people other than their close friends, as this seems to provide for a greater diversity of opinion. Students may write about anything they wish as long as it pertains to education, or to the classes they are taking.

The journals provide an opportunity for students to share thoughts, concerns, and resources that might not otherwise arise in the context of the course. In this way, students

begin to control their own learning and begin to create a community of learners. We use the same journals from quarter to quarter so students also gain insight into what peers taking the course during earlier quarters may have been thinking about. This helps students to see their own concerns as neither foolish nor unique and thus helps students to feel a part of a larger community. Because the journal thus becomes a public document with a varied audience, students are more likely to be concerned about spelling, grammar, and like issues.

The content of the journals ranges from mundane responses about what students like or dislike, to discussions about concerns with specific classes or instructors, to the real dialogue and reflection of the above excerpt. In some cases, genuine learning, sharing, and reflection happens. In others, topics change as students come to important issues or philosophical crossroads (democracy vs. school structure; fairness in schools, etc.). In these cases it seems that the discussions become too threatening to students' world views, and so someone suggests a new topic for discussion and the dialogue starts down a new path. In one of the journals, during a discussion concerning the inherently unfair nature of grading, one student wrote, *"This journal is getting too heavy of mind. What did you think of Linda's test?"*

Text Sets and Literature Circles

A group of four students are working to generate an answer to the question, "How should we facilitate writing in the elementary classrooms?" Scott has read Writing With Power *by Peter Elbow (1981), a book which focuses on helping adults to write. Lori has read Lanham's* Revising Prose *(1979) a book concerned with helping writers "clean up" their prose through the use of active voice, the removal of extraneous verbiage, etc. Kirk has read Lucy Calkins'* Lessons From a Child *(1983), which details one classroom's move into a process approach to writing, and particularly details one child's development as a writer throughout the school year. Cynthia has read* What's There to Write About *(1989), and the section on the Authoring Cycle from* Creating Classrooms for Authors *(Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988).*

When they meet, each comes to the group with a slightly different perspective. Scott is concerned with eliminating distractions and "clearing the decks for writing." Lori is concerned about skills and style. Kirk is most concerned with how the classroom would actually function. Cynthia's concern is helping children find topics and helping them help one another. Drawing these perspectives together isn't an easy task, but after several extended discussions they come to some guidelines of what they think should happen in classrooms. They decide to present their decisions to the class in the form of a booklet which describes an ideal writing curriculum. Each student will write a set of vignettes that address the specific concerns each investigated. They plan to piece the vignettes together to make a how-to book on process writing that specifically addresses the concerns of student teachers and first year teachers.

These students were engaged in a *Literature Circle* about the *Text Set* described above. A Literature Circle is created when a group of people come together to read, discuss, and respond to a text or group of texts. A Text Set is a related set of books (typically chosen by an instructor) either about the same topic or based around the same underlying theme. An overall question, or some beginning themes, may be suggested by the teacher. From this beginning, the group develops its own reading schedule, discussion topics, and ways of sharing with others. (For more information on Text Sets and Literature Circles see Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988.) We chose these particular texts for the variety of perspectives they present, but even using a single work students bring a variety of perspectives and personal experiences to the task, and create understandings far greater than any one of them could have created alone.

We use the same structure in our classes when our students read children's literature as well. Groups of students sign up to read chap-

ter books or picture books. They read individually or with a partner and respond to their reading in their literature logs. The students then get together in their groups and share their written responses and other insights from the part of the book they read for that day. When the class has completed the reading and literature discussion, we then reflect on these processes and how our learning was affected by both the content of the readings and by the literature circle process itself.

Authors' Circles

Kirk, Scott, Cynthia, and Lori as a group have to read the vignettes they have written to complete their literature circle. Scott chooses to read his piece about brainstorming, outlining, and freewriting first. After reading the piece, he comments on several sections he feels are problematic and asks the others about their responses to those sections. For the most part, the group didn't find those sections to be a problem and only made minor suggestions.

However, Cynthia wondered if outlining is really compatible with the other two strategies and, through responding, Scott decided that the term "outlining" denoted a more linear strategy than he had intended. Scott opts for the term "organizing," which allows him to present several alternative strategies to organizing a text.

The discussion of linear sequence causes Lori to observe, "Aren't you falling into the same trap when you assume that brainstorming comes before organizing, and that organizing comes before free writing? Aren't they really parallel strategies?" Scott agrees and decides that although he will present the strategies in this same order he will rewrite his vignettes to show that writers move freely among these strategies based on their current needs.

Kirk then reads his piece which describes a writing workshop much like those described by Calkins. The description is rich and vivid, so much so that Scott asks, "Aren't we being a little too idealistic here? I mean let's get real, could you really pull all of this off in a classroom?" Lori is concerned that there is no mention of the mechanics of writing here. Kirk says he'll think about both of these points as he revises.

The previous vignette describes the workings of an author's circle (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). Having completed written drafts of their papers, a small group of students came together in an author's circle to get feedback and to help one another. When they met, each student read his/her own work, thus retaining control and ownership of the work. The effective presentation of content is the focus of discussion at this time, setting aside mechanics for later consideration. Listeners provided support for the work, questions about areas which may not have been clear, and suggestions about areas of concern to the author or to the listener. Each of the students responded to each other's texts, and the authors were free to accept or disregard any suggestions as each saw fit.

We first describe the authoring cycle to our students to get this process started. Students may need considerable support as they begin this process, as the sharing of their writing can be a frightening prospect. Students' previous experiences with writing, either in school or in their college classes, often contribute to this fear.

We have used a variety of strategies to help students give one another helpful feedback. These include brainstorming the kinds of questions that would be appropriate to a particular type of work, providing students with examples of questions appropriate to an author's circle, asking the authors to come with concerns about their own work or, at its simplest, asking listeners to respond with "two plusses and a wish." That is, two positive statements about the work and one "I wish you had . . ." statement.

Still, many students are only capable of saying "It's good" or "I liked all of it." We see this as a defensive posture based on the unspoken agreement that "if you don't criticize my work I won't criticize yours." However, as

trust is built among a group of writers, they open themselves to greater risk and therefore greater potential for learning as well. The everything-is-fine comments give way to constructive critique. The author's circle becomes a collaborative venture where each participant enters into and contributes to each of the manuscripts.

We use this same process to help our students write children's books. From the conception of an idea, to the binding of an illustrated text, the students grapple with the challenges authors, illustrators, editors, and publishers must address. This is a powerful experience as they feel the accomplishment of becoming published authors. These books, and the process used to create them, are later shared with children in a visit to elementary school classrooms. Typically, children respond by sharing their own writing experiences as the university students talk about how they created their books. This activity provides an opportunity for authentic, open-ended dialogue with children about writing, and allows prospective teachers to interact with elementary students as co-learners engaged in similar experiences.

Expert Projects

The children's literature course is almost over, and Carrie and Pete are ready to share their expert project related to managing literature studies in elementary classrooms. The slide projector is set up, and three fifth grade students from the local elementary school help Carrie and Pete explain the slides which were taken in their classroom during literature study time. A pleasant tune is playing softly on the stereo in the corner. All the students feel free to comment, and the discussion is lively as each slide is shown.

Carrie and Pete then pass around the students' literature response logs and the self evaluation checklist each child completed. The three fifth graders, along with Carrie and Pete, answer the class's questions while everyone has popcorn and juice. The conversation is natural, much like a group of friends.

The "expert project" format evolved from a need the college students expressed during the children's literature course several quarters ago. The students felt there were still questions they had that were not fully addressed in the course. We realized it was these self-generated questions that would be most effective in directing their learning. We used the following format for the projects.

The students first brainstormed questions they felt had not been answered to their satisfaction. After listing and grouping about twenty-five questions, the students chose the ones that interested them the most. Candace and Julie wanted to know more about Native American literature. Patricia was concerned about how to evaluate literature response journals. Beth, George, Kim, and Curt decided to learn more about portfolio evaluation. Kelly, Sue, and Ken wanted to find more read aloud titles that upper elementary children would be likely to enjoy. Thomas and Judith wanted to write a series of parent letters informing parents about the literature program and suggesting how they could help at home. And, of course, Carrie and Pete wanted to know more about setting up intensive literature studies.

After identifying the questions and areas of interest, the students then brainstormed possible sources where they could find answers to their questions. This included library research, talking to teachers and media specialists, talking to classmates and faculty members, and interviewing children and/or parents. In order to learn more about setting up intensive literature studies, Carrie and Pete decided to read *Grand Conversations* (Peterson & Eeds, 1989) and discuss it. They talked to Helen, a fifth grade teacher who bases her reading program on literature studies, and observed in her classroom. During this observation Carrie took slides and Pete took notes. They also interviewed some of the fifth graders about the reading program. They took notes and made several charts during this process.

After they found the information they needed, the students decided how they could best share their insights with the class. They

were the "experts" on their questions. The literature study group decided to show their slides and ask some of the fifth grade students to help them. Some of the other groups role played, gave book talks, showed materials they developed, and arranged a field excursion to a school.

Through these "expert projects," the students were able to take control of their learning. As the course was coming to a close, we realized that there was no way we could cover all topics thoroughly and that as the students learned more, this increased knowledge led to more questions! We realized we all need to be able to ask and answer our own questions in a supportive environment. We feel "expert projects" is one way to facilitate this learning. "Community engagement" also fosters inquiry.

Community Engagement

In the following vignette, the students are involved with what we call a "community engagement," a project designed to help students use the community as a resource for creating knowledge and meaning. This particular project involved historical research but such projects lend themselves to non-historical content areas equally well.

Edie, Linda, Jennifer, Jillaine, and Robin are interested in researching some aspect of local history for a social studies project. On their way home they pass an abandoned small building. Edie says that it used to have old style gasoline pumps in front of it. She lives nearby and thinks she has heard that it is called Bailey's Station. They decide to do their local history project about Bailey's Station. After some discussion, they decide to start their research with both the local historical society and local community records. After several false starts, they find some beginning information.

Bailey's Station was a halfway stop for coach passengers between St. Cloud and St. Anthony (now Minneapolis), Minnesota. An inn and hotel built by Orlando Bailey in 1848 had once stood here. Digging a little deeper, the student researchers discover that some of Bailey's descendents still live in the area. They decide to interview these folks, and therefore, make some decisions about interview questions. Jennifer searches for information on the Bailey family, Edie pursues the interviews, while Robin and Linda continue to search through newspapers and other documents about the community.

When they pool their information, they find that Bailey's Station was not just a halfway house, but was actually a small community. By piecing together what they have found, they are able to build a chronology of the town's development and a Bailey Family Tree. They find that the community had a cemetery (recently restored and now maintained by the Boy Scouts) and a one-room school (still standing). The halfway house had been destroyed by fire in 1914. It was replaced by a house and a large round barn which is still standing. The students' only problem is that the barn is across the street from the gas station. They still don't know anything about the gas station except that it wasn't Bailey's Station. Edie's interviews revealed that Bailey's Station was a small town which included the very area where she now lives.

The creation of knowledge and insight associated with this activity seems very powerful to students, and in their own excitement about learning they can see the responses children would have to such an activity. Simultaneously, through their own processes they are learning about themselves, about the topic, and about teaching and learning. Students also find the community engagements particularly enjoyable because of use of the community and the necessity of dealing with people in their research.

We begin this process simply enough by asking students to choose a local history topic in which they are interested. It could be an old building, an institution, an issue of continued local concern or even a geographical feature (such as Lake George, a small lake in the center of St. Cloud). Students develop questions they wish to answer, brainstorm sources of

information, make visitations and conduct interviews as appropriate, and use libraries, museums, newspapers, and public records to gather information. Finally students correlate, prepare, and present their findings. We require them to keep a log of their meetings, discussions, activities, leads, dead-ends, and questions, and to develop artifacts which represent their work and their topic of study.

The community engagement can be used to investigate any aspect of the community and could easily include other content areas such as science, health, or math. For example, bus routes, placements of elementary schools, stop signs or traffic signals, local electricity generation, water purification, local environmental problems (to name but a few) will all lend themselves well to this type of investigation. The implicit integration of content becomes plainly obvious as students pursue their questions. We conclude the activity with the presentations, and by discussing what we learned, how we learned, and possible applications in schools.

Summary

The five activities described herein were developed because we think they are good models of the processes we would like to see in elementary classrooms. They engage students in authentic activities, facilitate the building of shared knowledge and involve significant student control of learning but the real power of these activities extends far beyond modeling. Through involvement in these activities our students learn from one another, set their own learning agendas, create shared knowledge, and perhaps most importantly, feel the power and joy in creating, sharing, and owning knowledge. We hope it will be these feelings they carry to their own classrooms and share with their students.

Please share your own experiences with these or other activities which embrace whole language philosophy in college and university settings with us in care of:

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